



## Leading Russian Military Journal *Voennaia mysl'* available as whole in the EastView digital database

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Russian academic military journals are still valuable primary sources of Russian defence and military studies. One of the best-known periodicals is the *Voennaia mysl'* and its predecessors. Now East View Publications have widened their database collection with the historical volumes of this journal. During the Soviet era *Voennaia mysl'* was published in parallel secret and top-secret editions – these are not included in EastView collections but are available as English translation in CIA's public electronic databases. This paper discusses on the significance of academic journals as primary sources, their availability and usability and the existence of parallel secret editions.

### *Voennaia mysl'* – history and meaning

Year 2018 was filled with anniversaries. As Finnish Defence Forces was celebrating its 100<sup>th</sup> years and we remembered our Civil War 1918, those who conduct Russian military studies had to keep their eyes towards the east since one of the main sources of Soviet and present Russian military thinking military theoretical journal *Voennaia mysl'* (*Military Thought*) saw its first day light in 1918, a year after the socialist revolution.

The first number published June 1 in 1918 under the name of *Voennoe delo* (*Military Matter*), which after several changes it was settled as *Voennaia mysl'* (later *VMy*) in 1937, included 19 articles. The very first article *Отъ редакциu* (*From the Editorial Board*) described the mission of the journal as following: “According to the decision to carrying out general military training and to establish combat-capable army there is a necessity to publish a journal featuring the enormous achievement of comprehensive scientific development has gained during the last World War and linked to technology and new forms of war. The war experiences must be the property of the whole people and it must form a lesson for the armed forces of Russia.”

This very first article reflects the Russian situation in the spring of 1918. After the October revolution new government had in its possession only the Red Guard which lacked serious combat experience. One of the revolutionists' goals was to end war with Germany. The ceasefire was declared on December 15(28). Soviet People's Commissariat (SOVNARKOM) gave January 15(28) a decree on forming the *Workers' and Peasants' Red Army* which was at first relied on volunteers. After the beginning of German onslaught (Operation Faustschlag) in February 1918 the new Red government was in serious trouble facing both internal and external opponents. Germans advanced rapidly, and Reds had no other choice than to accept their ultimatum leading to the treaty of Brest-Litovsk on March 3, which ended the war with Germany. Soon

after the peace treaty SOVNARKOM issued a decree on general liability to military service for all male citizens.<sup>1</sup>

The very essence of *VMy* is to reflect both the context and the military thought of the top military strategist and theorists. Along with the military theoretical literature, field manuals and military encyclopaedias *VMy* forms the corpus of the Soviet and Russian military theory. Disregarding this essential knowledge is likely to result in inaccurate interpretations of present and coming articles and speeches of the Russian military.



Figure 1. From the Editorial Board. The cover page and very first article of leading Russian military journal describes itself as “a weekly military-scientific, literature, illustrated journal”.<sup>2</sup>

Some small details of the first number are interesting. Among the authors are the military professionals of the Russian imperial army

<sup>1</sup> Колтиков 2006, 218–219; Lalu 2014, 70.

<sup>2</sup> EastView *Voennaia mysl'* database (VM-DM).



like general and professor Aleksandr Neznamov (1872–1928), the nation and country which the new armed forces is to defend is called Russia (neither yet Soviet Russia nor Soviet Union) and the facsimile layout of in EastView gives reader possibility to refresh skills with old Russian orthographic, abandoned by decree in October 1918. The first number with new orthographic was issued on November 29, the same year.

#### Knowledge on secrecy around VMy.

During the Cold War until 1989, VMy was restricted only to Soviet officers.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the basic edition, there have been other editions of the journal as well. A declassified 1972 article from the CIA's internal journal *Studies in Intelligence* notes that there were three different editions of the journal: the 'basic' Military Thought, a secret edition called the *Collection of Articles of the Journal Military Thought*, and a top-secret edition initiated in 1960, called the *Special Collection*.<sup>4</sup>

While the originals of these classified editions are not available, translations of the classified journals are available through the CIA's archive.<sup>5</sup> A translation of the first issue of the top secret *Special Collection* states that the purpose of the journal was to allow authors from the highest levels of the Soviet armed forces to express ideas and critical remarks on immediate problems which could not be done in other journals.<sup>6</sup> Debates in the *Special Collection* covered subjects such as how future war in Europe could be conducted – with massive nuclear strikes or conventional forces.<sup>7</sup>

It is not known how long this top-secret edition was published, and the CIA archives only contain translations of the *Special Collection* up to the year 1961. However, translations of the secret Collection span from 1961 to 1975. Based on indexing of the translations, the secret version was published three times a year at least up to 1975. It is likely the secret edition continued to be published after this.

A content comparison of the secret and basic journal editions makes clear that the content was unique in each of the journal editions. Still authors who contributed to the basic edition also did contribute to the secret editions.

#### CIA Archive Problems

A problem with the usability of the CIA archives is that information there is not readily discoverable. The VMy translations are scattered in the database with a little to no metadata, so it has been necessary to manually compile an index of the translations. This was done by conducting searches with different keywords into the database and compiling the results into a single table. The data was then cleaned for duplicates and metadata was manually extracted from the articles. This process began in 2017 and continued until the end of 2018.

During this process, it became apparent that metadata for some records did not correspond to the PDF content that was linked with them. In the summer of 2017, during the building of the index, it was noticed that some file pathnames had changed on CIA's website. It seems likely that some changes were made to the backend directory structure, which resulted in some files getting overwritten.

The indexing work revealed that 65 Soviet journal article translations were incorrectly linked. These missing articles were manually recovered from a CIA historical release DVD, completing the collection. From a research perspective, it would be desirable that the CIA archive fixes this issue, so that the files would be available from the proper primary source.

#### Accessibility and usage in Finland

Finnish National Defence University's library (FNDUL) has a remarkably good collection of Russian Imperial and Soviet era publications which include the early years of Vmy and its predecessors. Although there is a remarkable gap of VMys after May 1941. After that the following copy in the FNDUL collections was published in 1990. The whole set of the Second World War and the following Cold War era VMys has been almost inaccessible to Finnish researchers.

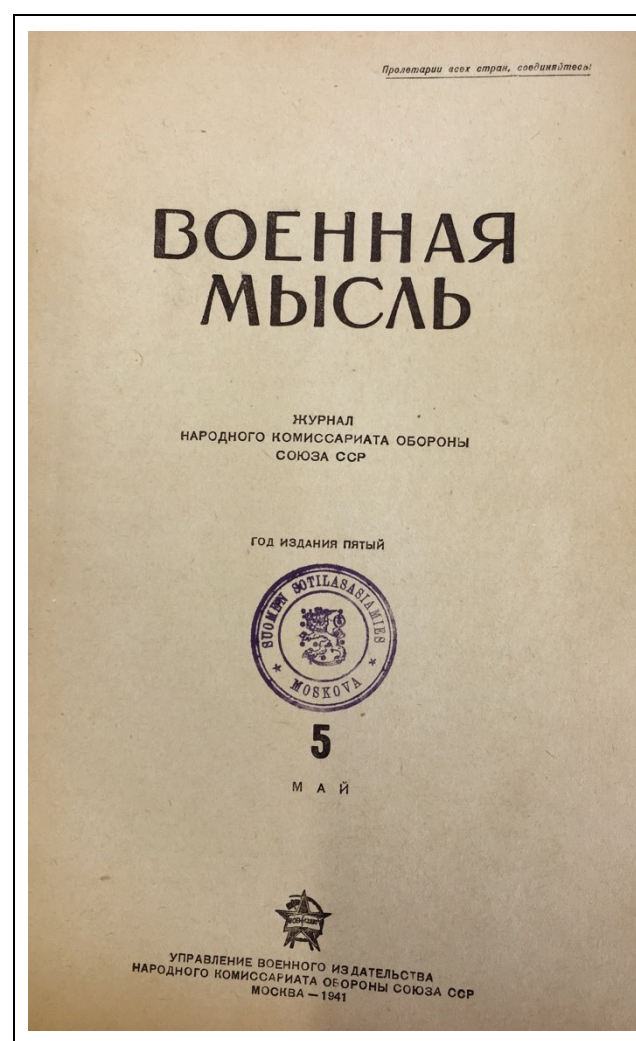


Figure 2. The cover page of the last *Voiennaia mysl'* (May 1941) issued before the German onslaught in 22 June 1941.<sup>8</sup> Rounded stamp indicates that this copy was purchased by the Office of Finnish Military Attaché in Moscow. VMy was not issued in June 1941, but as soon as July 1941 double-issue which articles covered the outbreak of Great Patriotic War was printed.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Clark & Laird 1990; Военный энциклопедический словарь 2007, 134–135.

<sup>4</sup> Parkinson 1972.

<sup>5</sup> The index can be found via <https://bit.ly/2QKRV4b>.

<sup>6</sup> CIA 1961.

<sup>7</sup> Bird & Bird 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Finnish National Defence University Library's Russica Collection, photo by Petteri Lalu.

<sup>9</sup> VMy 6–7 (1941), see also VMy 1(1990), back cover.





It is sad to say that in Finnish military science studies in last 25–30 years, references to *VMy* are quite few. However, there are some delightful exceptions. Harri Ohra-aho used newly 'exposed' *VMy* as a source in his General Staff officers' courses masters' thesis in 1993<sup>10</sup> and later in FNDU publication *Venäjän asevoimat 2000-luvun alussa* (Russian Armed Forces at the beginning of 2000) with his colleagues (Georgij Alafuzoff, Ali Mättölä and Juha Wihersaari) referred *VMy* as their source<sup>11</sup>. Jari Kallio referred the volumes of *VMy* 1991–92 in his masters' thesis discussing landing operations<sup>12</sup>. *VMy* was cited over 25 times and the available articles were thoroughly researched with search and find tools in Petteri Lalu's doctoral dissertation in 2014<sup>13</sup>. In the follow-up edition of FNDU's 1999 study *Venäjän asevoimat muutoksessa - Kohti 2030-lukua* (Russia's evolving armed forces - towards the 2030s) *VMy* is cited only by two of the authors<sup>14</sup>.

After the 90's the usage of *VMy* as a source in FNDU has diminished and authors using this essential source are fewer than 20 years ago. There are two obvious reasons. The usage of internet searches as the primary tool of obtaining information on articles. Another obvious reason which is specific to military related studies after the collapse of Soviet Union is the lack of readers capable to obtain theoretical information written in Russian.

First problem, the negligence of academic journals is twofold. Basic reason is the human self-indulgence – if students tasked to write a thesis may do it by using popular sources which are easily accessed with one mouse click, why bother to do systematic searches in article databases of even with paper volumes? This is a matter of discipline and it does not apply only students and their supervisors but all modern authors. Second problem are the academic journals. If they are not publishing relevant and necessary information in time, and they stick on their acquired position as the gatekeepers of reliable academic information they will not win the battle of luring new readers. New forums where the authors and their peers have more control over the publishing process will challenge them.

Besides the Russian language version articles of *VMy* are available in the English edition called *The Military Thought* (MT) which was issued by EastView from 1990. Publication gives non-Russian language readers possibility to acquaintance the selected articles. Still, it is clear that relevant and independent research in Russian studies requires sufficient Russian language skills.

Today the FNDU library does not subscribe hard copies of *VMy* nor *MT*. Digital database issued by EastView Information Services is available for FNDU students and their teachers after a couple of mouse clicks.

#### Interests in the United Kingdom and United States

During the Soviet times, *VMy* was actively sought by Western militaries, in hopes it would shed light on the development of Soviet military thinking. As a result of those endeavours, physical archives of *VMy* materials also exist. The Russian Military Studies Archive in Shrivenham, the UK has paper *VMy* editions from 1964 to 2010, and on microfiche from 1938 to 2004. This does not cover the *Collection* (secret) or *Special Collection* (top secret) editions.

In the United States, *VMy* was carefully read and analysed by intelligence and military personnel. A 1972 article in CIA's internal

Studies in Intelligence journal discussed the revelations US analysts had based on *VMy* articles, such as discerning the precise mission of certain weapon systems.<sup>15</sup>

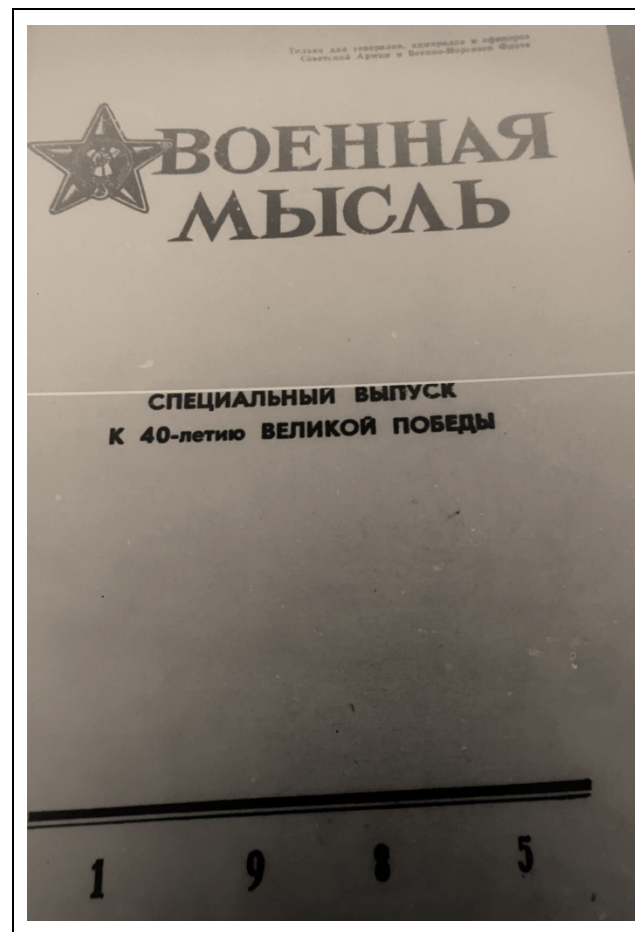


Figure 3. The magazine cover of 1985 special issue of *VMy* covering the Victory of the Great Patriotic War. Text on the top right indicates that during the Cold War *VMy* was delivered "Only to the generals, admirals and officers of the Soviet Army and Navy".<sup>16</sup>

#### EastView's *VMy* database – browse or search

*VMy* and other publications in the EastView database are accessible by browsing the titles of selected periodical. In *VMy* the last issue of volume, typically the December issue has the yearly index of articles. Browsing is the best way to start familiarization in *VMy* (and any other academic journal) because it gives the overlook to the contents and puts issued articles on the timeline.

After making the acquaintance of Russian military studies and *VMy* as one of the essential sources one may consider the use of the digital search engine. EastView database contains the basic and advanced search tools. Search may be conducted into the entire database of all periodicals of EastView or just in specific periodicals, in given timeframes. Even the basic search tool is equipped with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT, NEAR) and wildcard and exact phrase search. The advanced search option lets user to

<sup>10</sup> Ohra-aho 1994. Published version in Finnish Military Scientific Journal *Tiede ja Ase* (Science and Weapon) a year later.

<sup>11</sup> Ohra-aho ym. 1999.

<sup>12</sup> Kallio 1993.

<sup>13</sup> Lalu 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Kesseli 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Parkinson 1972.

<sup>16</sup> Microfiche, Russian Military Studies Archive in Cranfield University's Barrington Library, photo Petteri Lalu.



narrow search further. Both Russian and English keywords may be used in searches.

In a brief and not so scientific field test exposed that East View search engine is a powerful tool but has a flaw, especially in the new Voiennaia mysl' database (DA-VM). This database seems to be technically based on the collection of PDF files which are processed through optical character recognition (OCR). The use of PDFs which are scans of the original printed pages seems to lead to a problem in search results. If the search result(s) of a keyword is originally printed at the end of an article, the search report claims that result in two (or as many as there are on that particular page) articles. This leads to inconvenience of opening an article which actually does not contain the search. Even more harmful this is if search results are used for any statistical research or quantified method. Search tool is also dependent of the quality of optical character recognition.

There is no information on EastView documentation on this error. We suggest EastView to add a visible disclaimer about this on the search reports of DA-VM and other reports derived from PDF based periodicals.

### EastView database still omits the secret version

The EastView collection at present time seems to include only the basic version of *VMy*. The secret Collection and top-secret Special Collection articles are not part of the collection. The secret versions are only available through the CIA archive, but the collection there is also incomplete, and the articles are only available as translations. It is not known exactly in what form the originals were acquired, i.e. were they were brought as originals, copies or photographed, since the secret versions were acquired through clandestine human intelligence. Declassification of the originals would be of research interest.

The compiled list of *VMy* articles from the CIA archive is publicly available and researchers are welcome to use it. The list can be found via: <https://bit.ly/2QKRv4b>.

### Conclusions

The articles of Russian academic military journals are still valuable primary sources of research. A prerequisite for their use is the knowledge of the Russian language. One of the best-known and valuable periodicals is *VMy*. Earlier the EastView Publications has done valuable work in digitizing and delivering *VMy* and other Russian academic military journal volumes for the researchers. Now, the collection has been supplemented with *VMy* and its predecessors' digitized volumes since 1918.

*VMy* was also released as a parallel secret and top-secret editions during the Soviet era. The only known source for these editions is the CIA archive, which however contains only translations of the originals. Though the collection is incomplete, they provide an interesting window into the debates among Soviet military thinkers.

**Thank you to the helpers.** Thanks to Dr. Mark Stout of Johns Hopkins University for helping with the acquisition of the *CIA Analysis of Warsaw Pact Forces* collection DVD, and to Dr. Steven Main and Rachel Daniels of the Russian Military Studies Archive in Cranfield University's Barrington Library and Joonas Parviainen from FNDU library for their valuable help.

### Epilogue

We are happy and proud to announce that Finnish National Defence University has decided to subscribe access to whole Voiennaia mysl' database (DA-VM). Database is accessible for all users at the premises of FNDU Library at Santahamina. The students and employees of FNDU may access *Vmy* database by using their *Haka* user access (<http://mpkk.libguides.com/eastview>). All employees of the Finnish Defence Forces may use their TUVE access.

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